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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses and maps the participation of girls in sport in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). A survey instrument was administered to a stratified random sample of 1,048 young people. Stratification of the sample was designed so that: (1) 80 respondents would be selected from each grade level (K-12); (2) each of the ACT school sports association zones would be equally represented; (3) both government and non-government schools were proportionally represented; and (4) the sample would contain equal numbers of male and female respondents. Major variables addressed in the survey included: family background; sports played in the four differing contexts; reasons for playing a favorite sport; factors which discourage participation in sport; use of leisure time; attendance at sporting events; attitudes about sports participation; sporting persons most admired; and involvement in competitive sport. Results suggest that girls ranked sport alongside being with friends as their favored leisure activity, and they indicated that the most important reasons for playing sport were to improve sporting skills, to be physically active, and to make new friends. Implications of findings (including comparisons to boys' responses to the survey) are discussed in the context of possible initiatives to encourage girls to incorporate the playing of sport into their lifestyles. (Author/LL)

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A MAPPING OF GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN SPORT IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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ABSTRACT

A Mapping of Girls' Participation in Sport in the Australian Capital Territory

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This paper outlines a research project designed to map the participation of young people in sport in the Australian Capital Territory (A.C.T.). Data was collected by means of an eighteen item survey which was administered to a stratified random sample of 1048 young people. Stratification of the sample was designed so that 80 respondents would be selected from each of the school year groups of K to 12, that each of the A.C.T. school sports association zones were equally represented, that both government and non-government schools were proportionally represented, and that the sample contained equal numbers of male and female respondents. There were only minor variations from this.

Major variables addressed in the survey related to: family background; sports played in the four differing contexts of in-school during classtime, as a school representative, for a community sports club or with family and friends; reasons for playing favourite sport; factors which discourage participation in sport; use of leisure time; attendance at sporting events; attitudes about sporting facilities; attitudes about sports participation; sporting persons most admired; and involvement in competitive sport.

The survey revealed significant information about girls' participation in sport in the A.C.T. It was found for example that girls ranked sport alongside "being with friends" as their favoured leisure activity, that their most important reasons for playing sport were to "improve my sporting skills", "be physically active" and "make new friends" and that the most important factor which would lead them to play more sport was "I could play when I want to and not at a set time".

The implications of the findings including comparisons to boys' responses to the survey questions will be discussed in the context of the initiatives which might be taken to encourage girls to incorporate the playing of sport into their lifestyles.

Introduction

This paper discusses the participation of girls in sport in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). This information was gathered as part of a research project conducted in 1992 which investigated the ways in which young people in the ACT are involved in sport. This research was jointly sponsored by the ACT Government's Office of Sport and Recreation, the ACT Junior Sport Council, the ACT Department of Education and Training, and the Australian Sports Commission.

The Research Study

The research involved surveying a stratified random sample of 1048 young people; approximately 80 were sampled from each of the thirteen year levels (K to 12) of the government and non-government school systems in the ACT with equal numbers of male and female participants. A total of 17 schools was involved – nine schools for K-6 students, 4 schools for Years 7-10 students and 4 schools for Years 11-12 students.

Information on this sample was obtained through the administration of an eighteen-item questionnaire with many of these items having sub-items. Major variables included in the questionnaire related to: gender, age, year group and school; country of birth of subject and of parents; sports played in classtime with family and friends, for a school, and for a community club; reasons for playing sport; use of leisure time; attendance at sporting events; attitudes about sporting facilities; attitudes about sports participation; sporting persons most admired; and involvement in competitive sport within the school and within the community.

This instrument was developed over a period of several weeks and involved close collaboration with a research project steering committee which was composed of representatives of the project's funding sponsors. The instrument was trialed with various age groups in a primary school (K-6), a high school (7-10), and in a secondary college (11-12). The administration of the questionnaire to the sample was tailored to the age and ability of the students. In the Year 7-12 groups, a researcher introduced the project, responded to any queries, and then asked the students to complete the questionnaire. In the case of Years 3-6 students, two researchers met with each group of students. After a brief introduction the researchers and students worked through the questionnaire together, question by question. For Years K-2 pupils a "buddy" system was employed. Year 6 students who had previously completed the questionnaire received additional guidance from the researchers; these students then administered the questionnaire to the younger children under the supervision of the researchers. This approach with the K-2 students worked extremely well and the researchers felt confident that they were able to report accurately the responses of these very young students to the issues raised in the survey instrument.

The questionnaire was administered during May and June 1992 and resulted in a considerable amount of information being available to the researchers on the involvement of these students in sport, and their attitudes to sport. The relational database management program Paradox 3.5 was chosen as the means of processing and analyzing the data.

Information was therefore made available on 523 girls, with approximately 40 from each age group from Kindergarten to Year Twelve. Full details of the study are available in the research report on the project (Clough and Traill, 1992).

Results of the Mapping Exercise

Sports Played

The participation rates of the 523 girls in twenty-five different sports, most of which had one or more modified versions, was assessed. This data was collected to take into account sports which the girls might have played in four different contexts – in classtime at school, with family or friends, for the school as in representative sport, or for a sporting club.

Table 1 Sports Played by Females by Context –Percent (N=523)

Sport	*In Classtime at School (%)*	*With Family or Friends (%)*	*For the School (%)*	*For a Sporting Club (%)*
Aerobics/Gymnastics	53	26	8	26
Athletics, Little Athletics	35	16	16	19
Australian Football	22	13	2	2
Baseball	27	12	5	2
Basketball	35	22	9	9
Bicycle Riding	10	80	1	2
Cricket, Kanga Cricket	48	27	7	2
Golf	5	26	0	1
Hockey/Minkey	36	10	11	7
Horse Riding	7	51	2	9
Lacrosse, Sofcrosse	15	2	1	0
Netball	44	28	32	24
Orienteering	19	9	3	3
Rugby League	12	16	1	1
Rugby Union	14	8	2	1
Skating	15	67	1	5
Skiing	7	32	2	2
Soccer	37	22	12	4
Softball	46	19	16	7
Squash	15	18	1	2
Swimming	40	77	21	20
Tee-ball	43	14	11	7
Tennis	29	45	4	14
Touch Football	28	20	3	1
Volleyball	47	24	10	3

The results as shown in Table 1 indicate that the most played sports in classtime were Aerobics/Gymnastics (53%), Cricket/Kanga Cricket (48%), Volleyball (47%), Softball (46%), Netball (44%), Volleyball (47%), and Swimming (40%). With family and friends the sports most played were Bicycle Riding (80%), Swimming

(77%), Skating (67%) and Horse Riding (51%). Participation rates dropped off quite dramatically in school representative and sporting club contexts. In school representative sport the highest participation rates were for Netball (32%), Swimming (21%) and Softball (16%). In the context of playing sport with community clubs the highest rates were recorded for Aerobics/Gymnastics (26%), Netball (24%), Swimming (20%) and Athletics/Little Athletics (19%). This sample of girls played most of their sports, therefore, either in classtime sessions at school or with family and friends.

Data was also available on the average number of sports girls in different year levels had played over their lifetime. This information provided in Table 2 shows, as might be expected, that the average number of sports played by girls by Year 10 was higher than the number played by younger girls. Interestingly, however, in all contexts, Year 10 girls had played a higher average number of sports than Year 12 girls. This is of interest to note when compared to research which suggests that females in the mid-teenage years tend to have been less involved in sport. Perhaps this data suggests that in this particular sample an interest in sport prevailed, but that it manifested itself through girls trying out several sports during their mid-teen years rather than concentrating on one or two sports.

Table 2 Average Number of Sports Played by Females by Context and Year Group

Year Group	*In Classtime at school*	*With Family or Friends*	*For the School*	*For a Sporting Club*
Year 3	2.6	4.8	0.8	1.7
Year 6	7.7	6.7	2.5	1.9
Year 10	11.0	8.2	3.0	2.3
Year 12	9.2	5.5	2.6	1.8

Preferred Leisure Activities

In terms of a preferred leisure activity, sport ranked with "being with friends" from a list of seven activities (Table 3).

Table 3 Average Rank for each Leisure Activity for Females

Activity	*Females*
Playing or Listening to Music	4
Hobbies	4
Reading or Writing	5
Playing sport	3
Going to scouts, guides, a church or social group	6
Being with your friends	3
Watching television	4

Reasons For Playing Favourite Sport

The major reasons these girls gave for playing sport were "It's fun" (98%), "It makes you feel good" (91%), "You make new friends that way" (82%), "It's something to do" (82%) and "People in this sport are really friendly" (79%). These clearly relate to social considerations and suggest that for these girls this factor played a major part in their decisions to play a sport. While the boys in the study also rated the enjoyment factor as high, they tended to rate more highly than the girls reasons for playing which related to sporting ability and futures in the sport. Other items of interest from this data, as shown on Table 4, are that "the Coach is good" was an important factor (66%).

Table 4 Reasons Female Students Play their Favourite Sport (N=523)

Reason	Yes	%	No	%	Other	%
My friends play it too	252	48	262	50	9	2
My parents encourage me to play it	225	43	287	55	11	2
I do not have to travel far to play it	191	37	325	62	7	1
Girls and boys can play it together	322	62	195	37	6	1
My mum plays, or used to play, this sport	129	25	384	73	10	2
It does not cost a lot to play	207	40	305	58	11	2
I am really good at this sport	368	70	133	25	22	4
I do not have to go to training sessions	147	28	368	70	8	2
It makes you feel good	477	91	43	8	3	1
The Coach is good	344	66	162	31	17	3
I am not likely to be injured in this sport	189	36	321	61	13	2
My dad plays, or used to play, this sport	104	20	403	77	16	3
It makes you look good	201	38	316	60	6	1
People in this sport are really friendly	414	79	100	19	9	2
My teachers encouraged me to play this sport	137	26	379	72	7	1
I want to represent the A.C.T. in this sport	256	49	257	49	10	2
You can make a good living from playing this	240	46	266	51	17	3
It's fun	513	98	10	2	0	0
It could help me overcome a disability	176	34	332	63	15	3
I saw it played on television	228	44	288	55	7	1
It helps you do well at schoolwork	177	34	337	64	9	2
I play this sport with my parents	140	27	367	70	16	3
You make new friends that way	431	82	85	16	7	1
I knew the coach	166	32	347	66	10	2
It's something to do	428	82	92	18	3	1

School Representative Sport

Forty-four (44%) of this sample of girls had represented their school in 1991 or 1992 in a competition against another school – as contrasted to 53.3.% of the boys in the study. The girls played in both girls only teams (55%) and mixed gender teams (43%). The teams were mostly coached by teachers (56.7%) or parents (13.4%).

Community Sports Teams

Gender differentiation in sporting participation for the young people in this study was quite evident at the community club level. From the total numbers in this sample, 54% of the boys had played for a community club in 1991 or 1992; however, only 37.7% of the girls had done so. As with school representative teams, most boys played on boys only teams (65.2%) as contrasted to girls who played in either girls only teams (50.7%) or mixed gender teams (45.1%).

Feelings When Playing Sport

The girls were asked to rate their feelings about playing sport in different contexts. This data is provided in Table 5. In classtime at school "fun" (61%), "develops skills" (57%), "others take it too seriously" (44%) and "excited" (43%), rated highest. With family and friends, the girls rated their feelings "fun" (83%), "excited" (65%), "satisfying" (50%) and "develops skills" (47%), as highest.. In school representative sport the higher ratings went to "excited" (56%), "fun" (56%), "develops skills" (49%), and "challenging" (47%). In sporting club contexts the higher ratings were for "excitement" (61%), "fun" (59%), "develops skills" (56%), and "challenging" (54%).

In this data, in all contexts, these girls therefore commonly described their feelings when playing sport in terms of sport being "fun", "exciting" and "challenging".

Table 5 Female Students' Feelings about Playing Sport in Different Contexts - Percent (N=523)

How children felt about playing sport	*In Classtime at School (%)*	*With Family or Friends (%)*	*For the School (%)*	*For a Sporting Club (%)*
Excited	43	65	56	61
Too Organised	27	10	19	23
Boring	32	8	12	11
Fun	61	83	56	59
Satisfying	38	50	43	45
Too many rules	30	11	24	22
Dangerous	18	14	14	16
Others take it too seriously	44	18	35	33
Too competitive	23	11	29	30
Challenging	37	38	47	54
Develops skills	57	47	49	56

Why Play Sport?

The children were given a number of reasons why they might play sport and asked to rank these reasons (Table 6). The girls gave their higher rankings to "improve my sporting skills" (88%), "be physically active" (86%), "make new friends" (84%), and "play close and exciting games" (77%). By contrast a higher proportion of boys than girls played sport to "compete against others" (83% boys,

66% girls), to "beat others in sport" (61% boys, 36% girls) and to "be like my sporting heroes/heroines" (boys 57%, girls 31%). In Year 7 a noticeably higher proportion of girls than boys played sport to make new friends – this was also true for the Year 10 and Year 12 levels.

Table 6 Females' Reasons for Playing Sport (N=523)

Reason	*Yes*	*%*	*No*	*%*	*Other*	*%*
Get medals and trophies	200	38	313	60	10	2
Beat others in sport	190	36	325	62	8	2
Make new friends	439	84	80	15	4	1
Compete against others	346	66	169	32	8	2
Play close and exciting games	405	77	109	21	9	2
Please the coach	222	42	289	55	12	2
Improve my sporting skills	459	88	59	11	5	1
Be physically active	450	86	68	13	5	1
Please my parents	241	46	272	52	10	2
Meet members of the opposite sex	179	34	338	65	6	1
Be like my sporting heroes or heroines	165	32	351	67	7	1

Meeting members of the opposite sex was not of concern to younger students, boys and girls being similarly unconcerned with meeting members of the opposite sex when playing sport. In Year 9 a change occurred in that half the girls played sport to meet members of the opposite sex while this reason was given by only 37% of boys in this year group. While meeting members of the opposite sex remained at a similar level of overall importance for the oldest students (Years 10, 11 and 12) it was noticeable that the trend that emerged in Year 9 did not continue and that a higher proportion of boys than girls played sport to meet members of the opposite sex. This difference was at its greatest for Year 12 students; just over half of the boys played sport to meet members of the opposite sex while only one quarter of the Year 12 girls played sport for this reason.

What Would Prompt Girls to Play More Sport?

Of the reasons provided (Table 7) the girls rated more highly the factors of "if there was a competition available in one of my favourite sports that I could do well in" (71%), "I could play when I want to and not at a set time" (63%), and "Sport did not cost me anything to play" (62%), as the reasons for playing more sport.

Table 7 Female Students' Reasons for Playing More Sport (N=523)

Reason	*Yes*	*%*	*No*	*%*	*Other*	*%*
An indoor area was available	271	52	242	46	10	2
I had transport available	285	54	230	44	8	2
Sport did not cost me anything to play	325	62	188	36	10	2
I could play when I want to and not at a set time	332	63	186	36	5	1
My parents allowed me to play	290	55	228	44	5	1
If there was a competition available in one of my favourite sports that I do well in	371	71	146	28	6	1

Reasons Which Discourage Girls From Playing Sport

Girls rated the major discouragements from playing sport (Table 8) as: "The coach only putting the good players into the game, so that I miss out" (65%), "The coaches not really being interested in the players, but just interested in winning" (63%), "Having a poor coach" (51%) and "My studies (lots of homework)" (50%). It is interesting to note how highly adverse comments about coaches have been rated on this list. This became particularly noticeable in data collected from Years 10, 11 and 12 girls.

Table 8 Reasons Female Students would be Discouraged from Playing Sport (N=523)

Reason	*Yes*	*%*	*No*	*%*	*Other*	*%*
Having a part-time job	200	38	311	59	12	2
My studies (lots of homework)	263	50	247	47	13	2
Having a poor coach	269	51	245	47	9	2
It costs too much money	253	48	258	49	12	2
Having to practise too much	132	25	384	73	7	1
The risk of being injured	150	29	365	70	8	2
Having more interesting things to do	189	36	320	61	14	3
My team losing all the time	122	23	392	75	9	2
Poor umpiring	244	47	257	49	14	3
Having barrackers and coaches yelling at me all the time	252	48	257	49	14	3
The season being too long	102	20	416	80	5	1
Having to travel all over the place to play matches	186	36	331	63	6	1
The coaches not really being interested in the players, but just being interested in winning	330	63	188	36	5	1
The coach only putting the good players into the game, so that I miss out	342	65	172	33	9	2
My friends not being interested in sport	115	22	403	77	5	1
My parents thinking I should not play so much sport	118	23	399	76	6	1
Having a disability and cannot play sport	209	40	304	58	10	2
There being nowhere near where I live to play the sport I would like to play	237	45	277	53	9	2
Our school being more interested in academic subjects than sport	166	32	345	66	12	2
Having to do other things than play, for example, umpiring, scoring	161	31	353	67	9	2

Sporting Heroes/Heroines

Both boys and girls in the sample were asked to identify their sporting heroes and/or heroines. Over 700 names were given. Three female "sporting heroines" were in the ten given most responses, Hayley Lewis, Lisa Curry-Kenny and Jane Flemming. However, when the girls in the sample were then asked if their heroes/heroines had influenced their sporting choices a majority of the girls

(54.4%) felt that this had not been the case. By contrast, 54% of the boys felt that sporting heroes/heroines had in fact influenced their sporting choices.

Attendance at Sports Events

The majority of these girls rarely attended live sports events (Table 9).

Table 9 Females' Frequency of Attendance at Live Sporting Events as Spectators

Frequency	*Number*	*Percent*
Never	142	27.2
Once or Twice a Year	179	34.2
Once per month	95	18.1
Once per week	92	17.6
Other*	2	0.4
Don't Know	4	0.8
No Response	9	1.7
Total	523	100

* excludes those who did not answer the question and those who answered "Don't know".

However, when asked if they would rather attend a live sports event than watch it on television, most girls preferred to attend a live sports event, especially in the Years 2, 5, 7, 8 and 10 groups. Only the Kindergarten girls preferred the "watch on television" option (Table 10). The girls expressed a high level of satisfaction with the existing sporting facilities in their area – 78.4% of the girls believing them to be sufficient.

Table 10 Female Students' Venue Preference (prefer to attend a live sports event rather than watch it on TV) by Year Group : Percent

Year Group	*Percent of Females*		
	Yes	*No*	*Sometimes*
Kindergarten	33.3	55.6	11.1
Year 1	50.0	47.5	2.5
Year 2	62.5	25.0	12.5
Year 3	40.0	22.5	37.5
Year 4	53.7	14.6	31.7
Year 5	61.0	7.3	31.7
Year 6	48.7	12.8	38.5
Year 7	65.1	7.0	27.9
Year 8	53.6	9.8	36.6
Year 9	42.9	7.1	50.0
Year 10	63.9	8.3	27.8
Year 11	44.4	5.6	50.0
Year 12	47.4	7.9	44.7
Total	50.5	17.2	30.4

Conclusions

What kind of profile then emerges on the participation rates and attitudes to sport of this random sample of just over 500 ACT girls? This profile appears to be:

- The girls in this sample were involved in a wide variety of sports participation. This feature became particularly noticeable at upper year levels (and contrasts with boys in the study who, at upper year levels, tended to focus on one or two major sports).

- The type of sports the girls played changed very much according to the context – in classtime at school sports such as aerobics/gymnastics, cricket/kanga cricket, volleyball, softball and netball attracted the highest participation rates; but when with family and friends out of school hours, sports such as bicycle riding, swimming and skating recorded the higher participation rates.

- Most of their sporting involvements occurred either in the context of classtime sport sessions at school or in playing sport with family and friends; school representative sport and playing in community sport club involved much lower participation rates.

- The social dimensions of sport were most highly valued by these girls. Having "fun" and "making new friends" typified the reasons girls gave for either currently playing a sport or for why they believed they should play sport.

- Adverse comments about coaches provided the main reasons why the girls became discouraged from playing sport. Whereas these girls wanted to play sport "... that I could do well in" they believed they were discouraged by coaches "only putting the good players into the game so that I miss out" and "... not really being interested in the players, but just interested in winning".

This sample of ACT girls, then emerges as having high rates of participation in sport and viewing this involvement in sport as of greatest value for its social interactions.

References

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